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# Clerics returning-with messages

London (Combined Dispatches)—Three American clergymen, carrying personal messages from hostages held by Islamic militants in the United States Embassy in Tehran, paused briefly here yesterday on the way home. The question about the exact number of captives remained unresolved.

The Revs. William Sloane Coffin and William J. Howard and Catholic Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton ended their Christmas visit to Iran saying they had seen all of the captives.

Before leaving Tehran, the three clergymen urged compromise in the hostage crisis, and the French archbishop of Algiers, Cardinal Etienne Duval, said on leaving the American clergies at Orly Airport in Paris that he had reason to hope for the "fastest and broadest possible measure of clemency" for the hostages, pawns in a 54-day-old standoff.

He said he found Iranian authorities and public opinion "favorable to an act of clemency," adding, however, that he had received no "exact promises."

## Have names of 43

The clergymen had conducted emotional Christmas Day services for the captives. The clerics are expected to report on their visit to Secretary of State Vance, amid conflicts as to the exact number of hostages. The Rev. Coffin said,



The Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and the Rev. William J. Howard (l. to r.) during stopover in London on way home yesterday.

they had the names of 43 they saw inside the embassy, although the State Department still contended it was "quite positive" there were 50 prisoners. The militants holding the hostages said that six did not want to attend the Christmas religious services.

The clerics were carrying 33 messages to family members of the hostages.

The Rev. Coffin, pastor of New York's interdenominational Riverside Church, offered his own theory on the numbers discrepancy. The clergyman, who worked for the CIA before becoming a minister, said that double identities possibly being used by some of the captives might account for the difference. The State Department, he said, knows who is there but is "afraid some guy has got two names and they don't know which name he is using."

The Rev. Howard, president of the National Council of Churches, said he found some of the hostages openly defiant of their Iranian captors, sometimes saying "snappy things" in answer to comments by the militants.

## "Almost walked out"

According to Bishop Gumbleton, Catholic auxiliary bishop in Detroit, the clergymen nearly called off their Christmas visit because the captors interfered with the services. He said he and his colleagues had engaged in a heated two-

hour confrontation with the militant Iranians.

"We almost walked out," he said. "We had our ideas about how we wanted to do things, and they had theirs."

"Dr. Coffin and I were ready to leave, but Rev. Howard and Cardinal Duval said we'd come this far to see these people, we'd better do it their (the captors') way."

He said the State Department is planning to bring the families of the hostages together for a general report by the three clergymen, who also plan to meet privately with individual family members.

Bishop Gumbleton said he had encountered no anti-American feelings in Tehran. "The atmosphere of the city was normal," he said.

The three clerics were expected to meet in Washington today with Vance.